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Home Center News ®

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84 Lumber plots major growth

By John Caulfield

EIGHTY-FOUR, Pa. — 84 Lumber is rumbling again about major expansion plans.

The 367-unit chain plans to open more than 200 stores nationwide over the next decade, which would bring its total close to 600. Based on the company's estimated average annual sales per store of $2.5 million, the additional units would put 84 Lumber's volume at around $1.5 billion.

To support that growth, the company is in the final stages of closing its six remaining regional buying offices, and will purchase all its merchandise directly out of its headquarters here.

In preparation for this expansion, 84 is in the formative stages of developing new programs for store management training, advertising and marketing, and operations. According to a company spokesperson, changes in the responsibilities of 84's corporate management are also being planned.

New manager opportunities

Joe Hardy Sr., 84 Lumber's president and owner, was unavailable for comment about the changes at his company. But in a prepared statement, he explained that this growth is being initiated to give store employees more career opportunities.

84 currently employs about 3,200 people, and the new stores are expected to create about 2,500 new jobs, including 1,000 entry-level positions. Four hundred current manager trainees will be promoted to co-manager and manager positions. About 50 managers will move into upper level management slots.

The company is revising its management training program, in anticipation of the need to have store personnel prepared to move in when stores are opened.

"You must change to meet the customers changing needs and act quickly," he said.

This hot air balloon, used to promote store openings for 84 Lumber, should be getting a real workout in coming years. Photo courtesy of 84 Lumber

Change, in the form of expansion, has been percolating in the mind of the 66-year-old Hardy for some time. In an interview with *BusinessWeek* in July 1984, Hardy envisioned a chain of close to 700 stores with sales of close to $3 billion by 1990.

Preoccupied with resort

Those plans were never realized, and for the most part 84 has been closing unprofitable units and opening new stores, with a net loss of around a dozen units over the past four years. (Over the past 31 years, 84 has built an average of 12 new stores annually.)

One reason the company expansion was put on hold was Hardy's involvement in developing Nemacolin Woodlands, a huge resort and conference center in Uniontown, Pa., which he purchased in 1987 and, according to a company spokesperson, has pumped more than $50 million into for a new health spa, a golfing academy, an executive conference center and the addition of 60 rooms onto an existing 30-room inn.

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Dealers look ahead to a strong 1989 23

Shingle market cannot absorb price hikes 29

Dealers test new way to calculate profit

By Edward McKinley

NATIONAL REPORT — Slowly, and with some hesitation, home improvement retailers are beginning to adopt Direct Product Profitability (DPP).

DPP provides a way of calculating profit for each item in the store by subtracting from the retail price the cost of the merchandise and the exact expense of handling. Proponents tout the method as more realistic than gross return on investment (GMROI) for assessing profits.

The calculation, which was made known primarily through the efforts of Proctor & Gamble and has been used by a growing number of retail sectors, is only now catching on among home center chains.

For example, Payless Cashways began using DPP, on a modified basis, in mid 1988. "And the first thing we noticed was how it was affecting our buying of seasonal products," said Brenda Nolte, a spokesperson for the 195-unit chain based in Kansas City, Mo. She noted that Payless plans to use of DPP "more extensively" this year.

Lowe's Cos., the home center industry's largest retailer, plans to use concepts associated with DPP to decide when to ship merchandise to distribution centers and when to ship directly to stores. "We're getting into the rudimentary stages of DPP," said Vaughn Hays, Lowe's vp-merchandising.

And The Home Depot, the 92-store chain with headquarters in Atlanta, has hired some DPP experts, but will not use the concept until it finishes with more pressing administrative concerns, including UPC scanning, an executive said.

(Continued on page 45)

Quake alarms shake up sales in Calif.

By Brad Altman

LOS ANGELES — Radon testing kits, move over.

The hot new products for California home centers this year will be earthquake warning and carbon monoxide alarms, if manufacturers get their way.

National Lumber, based in Fountain Valley, introduced "California Quake-Awake" in its 20 stores in late December and the product "took off like fire," said Curtis Allen, plumbing and electrical buyer for the chain, which sold 300 Quake-Awakes in two weeks, with no advertising.

The battery-powered device, which retails for $27.99, is said to sound an alarm a few seconds before a quake hits.

Several hardware stores in San Diego, meanwhile, are selling a carbon monoxide alarm manufactured by San Diego-based Quantum Group Inc. The CO*Star alarm, also battery-powered, has a suggested retail of $69.95.

It's hard to say how well these products work. *NHCN* contacted a number of scientific and governmental sources, none of which was ready to endorse earthquake alarm products.

Hall Dailey, a spokesman at the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, Calif., said the university, which does earthquake research, "neither endorses nor evaluates products and the Quake-Awake has not been tested by us. We do not know whether it does or doesn't do [what is claimed.]"

At the California Office of Emergency Services in Ontario, Calif., an employee said that department, a branch of the governor's office, does not "express opinions" on products, but allowed that QuakeAwake "doesn't have our blessing."

These alarms are also stirring some debate among DIY dealers who wonder if they are a flash-in-the-pan.

(Continued on page 45)

NEWSBREAKS

HOMECLUB TAPS TRIANGLE EXEC AS NEW SENIOR VP-OPERATIONS: Martin Schaeffer, former general manager of Triangle Building Centers, which was purchased recently by Hechinger, will have two regional vps reporting to him at HomeClub.

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL INDUCTS TWO: Phil Mansfield, former executive vp of Hechinger, and Leonard Gertler, president of All American Home Center, go into the Home Center Hall of Fame during the Home Center Show in March.

INDUSTRY UPDATE

Lowe's 3Q income falls 6 percent

NORTH WILKESBORO, N.C. — Lowe's net income for the third quarter fell 6 percent, and its sales were essentially flat. For the three months ended Oct. 31, the industry's largest dealer generated $652,122,000 in volume, a 1 percent gain over the same period a year ago. But earnings fell to $15,893,000, or 43 cents per share.

Retail sales represented 58 percent of the chain's total volume. The company reported that "depressed housing starts and deflation have squeezed contractor sales and margins." In the first three quarters, during which Lowe's historically gets about 85 percent of its year's sales, volume was flat at $1,947,327,000. But net income rose 4 percent to $57,407,000, or $1.51 per share. Lowe's goal this year is to surpass its per-share high of $1.70 in 1984. (Between 1982 and 1987, Lowe's generated 23 percent of its sales and 15 percent of its earnings in the fourth quarter.)

The 299-unit chain also reported that its program to add 1.2 million square feet of retail space in 1989, with 33 new stores, was in full swing. Fourteen stores, ranging in size from 40,000 to 60,000 square feet, are currently under construction and are scheduled for completion by March.

West parent guilty of infringement

HARTFORD, Wis. — The company that owns West Building Materials and its importing division were found guilty by a federal court of infringing on the Nautilus trademark held by Broan Manufacturing, the ventilation and specialty products division of Nortek Corp.

A jury in U.S. Federal Court in Memphis, Tenn., awarded Broan more than $500,000 on Jan. 10. It found against Associated Distributors, the Atlanta company that is West's umbrella corporation, and Republic Manufacturing & Import Co., a subsidiary, for importing a bath exhaust fan from a Taiwanese manufacturer and displaying the products to look like a Nautilus fan.

Broan presented evidence showing the product's packaging, which included photographs of Nautilus fans with Nautilus' name visible. In a prepared statement, Donald Schlegal, Broan's president, called infringement actions "blatant violations of the law."

The 66-unit West was found to have sold the imported products in its stores from Nautilus displays and to have used Nautilus ad artwork in its promotions.

Richard Wilson, an attorney for Associated, called the award "unjustified," and claimed that "three quarters of the jury award was for future damages that haven't happened and may never happen."

He contended that neither Association nor Republic had anything to do with making the product or producing its packaging. The fans were purchased from Fortune International, a now-defunct importer that bought them from Taiwan. Broan did not name Fortune or the manufacturer in its suit. Wilson said the decision would be appealed.

Whirlpool to sell kitchen division

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. — Whirlpool Corp. has reached an agreement in principle to sell Whirlpool Kitchens, its kitchen and bathroom cabinet business, to a private investment partnership consisting of Bund Capital and John Malaspina.

Whirlpool spokesperson Donna McLean said no decision has been made on what will happen to the 12 Design Works Kitchen centers located in California, Colorado and Arizona (*NHCN*, Dec. 26, 1988). Whirlpool will take a loss of $45 million, or $65 a share, for the disposal of the business, she said. No financial conditions of the deal were disclosed.

Lanoga names new vp and cfo

REDMOND, Wash. — William P. Brakken has been named vice president and cfo of the 120-unit Lanoga Corp. based here. He formerly was treasurer and controller.

President Daryl Nagel said the cfo position has been vacant since Steve Hall left in May 1987. Brakken joined Lanoga in 1982 and has held several accounting and finance positions.

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HWI's lumber dealers celebrate mini-boom at their annual show

By Tom Bagsarian

ORLANDO, Fla. — This year's sales will very much resemble last year's for lumber and building material dealers affiliated with Hardware Wholesalers, Inc. This, according to executives for the co-op, is not bad news.

The buying group's officials, about 250 of its lumber dealer-members and 100 vendors had gathered at the Stouffer Resort near Sea World on Jan. 13 and 14 for the co-op's annual lumber market show. And HWI's people were smiling because they'd just perused December 1988 sales, which showed a 15.6 percent increase over the same month a year ago.

In addition, lumber sales that HWI was drop shipping to its members increased by 15 percent for the full year. Being near Disney World's Fantasy Land did not invalidate these figures, which are real.

"Even members in Texas are doing real well," said Ray Treen, vp of building materials at the 2,750-member co-op, which for the first time hit the $1 billion sales mark in 1988. "New residential housing may be down 3 or 4 percent, but we

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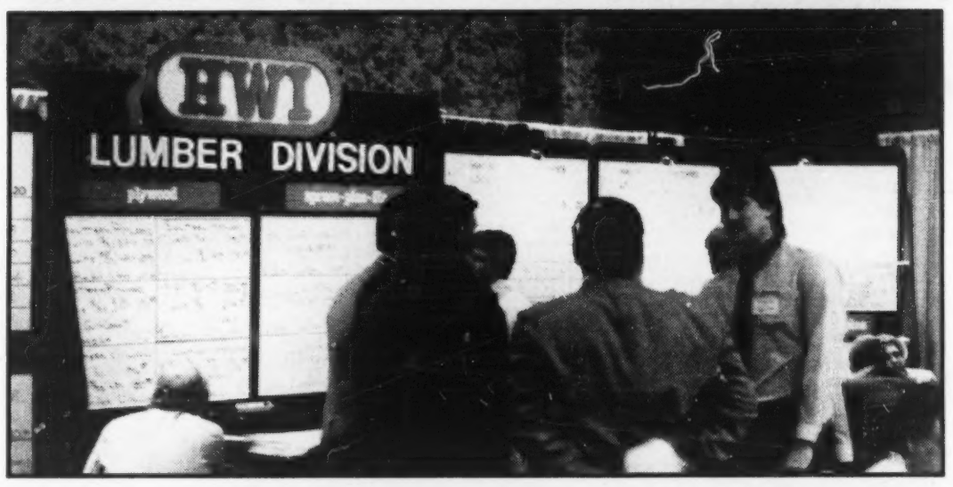

The bustle at the lumber booth at HWI's annual lumber market show indicates the degree of success dealer members had this past year in the category. NHCN photo

Westlake resigns from president's post

By Gary S. Ruderman

LENEXA, Kan. — Scott Westlake, the expansion-driven president of the 43-unit Westlake Hardware here, tendered his resignation from both the president's post and the three-person executive committee of the family-owned chain.

The executive committee and board of directors passed the mantle to store manager and shareholder Paul Kuckelman of Columbia, Mo.

The 36-year-old Westlake said in a press release he intended to remain active on the board of directors, hold "significant share ownership," but planned to "pursue other interests." He set no date for vacating the president's post. The decision, made in December but made public only Jan. 12, reportedly came as a surprise to the board.

While it was Westlake's decision, and board members described the resignation as "very amicable," there previously had been a feeling on the board "to move [the chain] a little slower," said Doug Burton. Burton, manager of the Chillicothe, Mo., store is one of three members of Westlake's executive committee. "Scott wanted to move faster than the rest of the board."

Westlake as a chain grew first from 1980 to 1985, doubling its number of stores to 35. Then, armed with internal capital from an estimated $80 million in sales, it began an acquisition binge in 1987.

(Continued on page 45)

Broadway For Your Home store misses the mark; shutters unit

By an NHCN staff editor

LENEXA, Kan. — The upwardly mobile, "status conscious, materialistic, competitive" shoppers apparently didn't shop at Broadway For Your Home's showcase unit in Lenexa, Kan., a Kansas City, Mo. suburb.

Craig Miller, Broadway's retail vp, said the two-year-old store, touted for its boutique look, closed Dec. 27 because it never met sales expectations. Broadway, which operates its original unit in Kansas City, has estimated retail sales of $13 million last year.

"The direction of the company could not wait" for better results from the store, Miller said in early January. Observers hinted parent Broadway Industries may shift its resources away from retail.

The investment and opening of the 40,000-square-foot store in Lenexa was predicated on home center industry growth and a 1985 demographic study.

Several months after the opening, Miller explained the demographics of the affluent area 10 miles south of Kansas City that led the company to invest: half of the 75,000 homeowners supposedly earned more than $35,000 a year and 25 percent of the homes were worth more than $125,000.

However, Miller now concedes there were too many changes in the actual market than what was expected from the 1985 demographic study.

"What stimulates [shoppers] to react has changed

(Continued on page 46)

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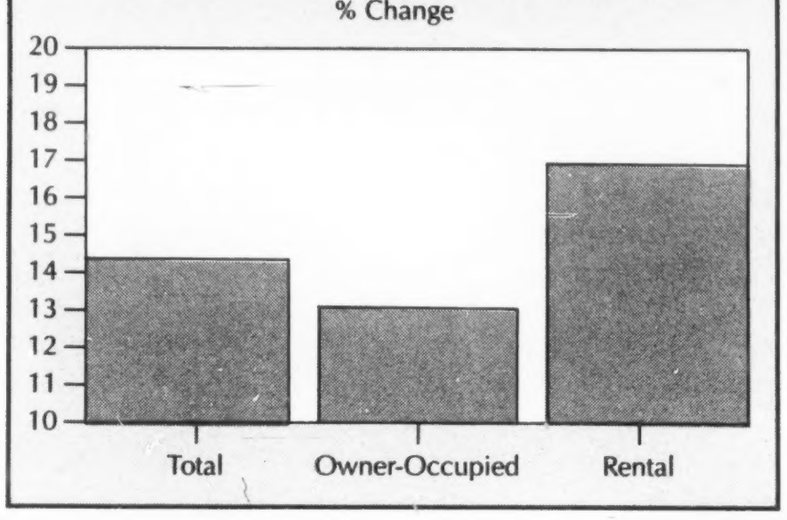

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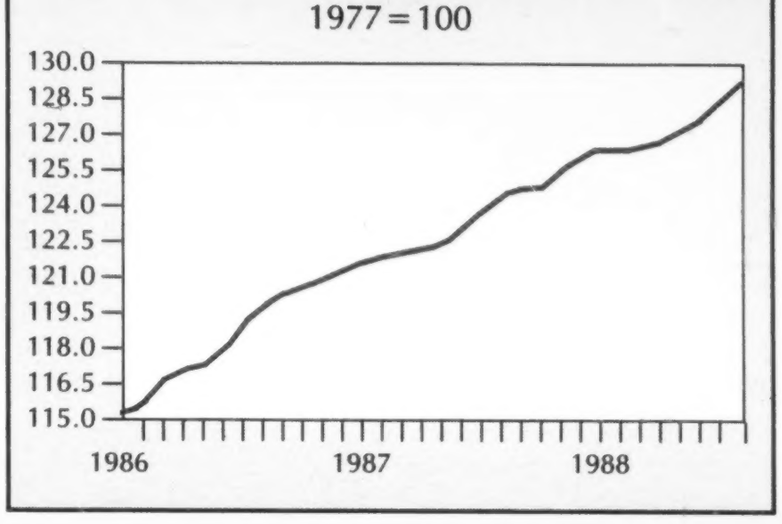

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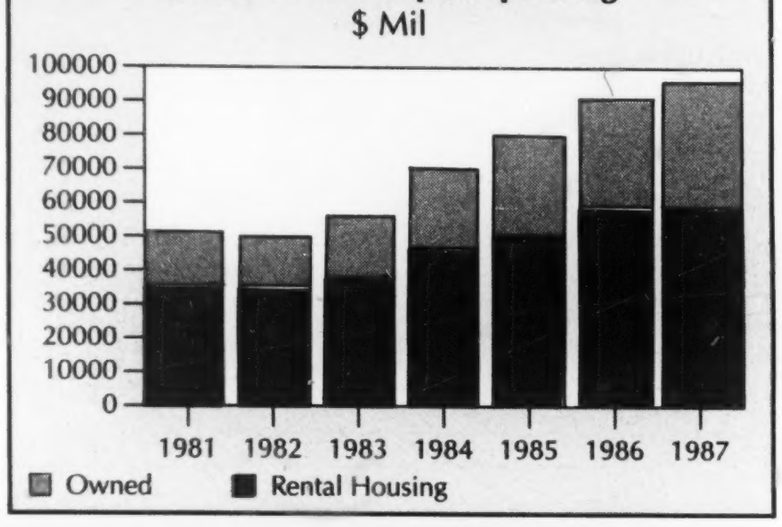


Rental improvement and upkeep create a retail growth market

By Richard E. Mount
Special to NHCN

Building material demand from the maintenance and improvement of rental housing has been a retail growth market in recent years.

From 1981 to 1987, we estimate that total spending for the upkeep and improvement of rental properties increased at a 15 percent annual rate, while for homeowner properties it was up only 8.5 percent.

Richard E. Mount

This raised rental properties from 30.5 percent of the total rehab market in 1981 to 38.3 percent in 1987. In that year, rehab spending for rental units rose 7.3 percent, and only 3.1 percent for owner-occupied. The rental market will continue to be a sustaining factor behind the 6.3 percent rise in building material demand expected for 1989.

The housing expansion of the 1980s has been stronger in multi-unit than in single family. Since 1980 the stock of rental housing has increased 16.7 percent, owner-occupied 13 percent.

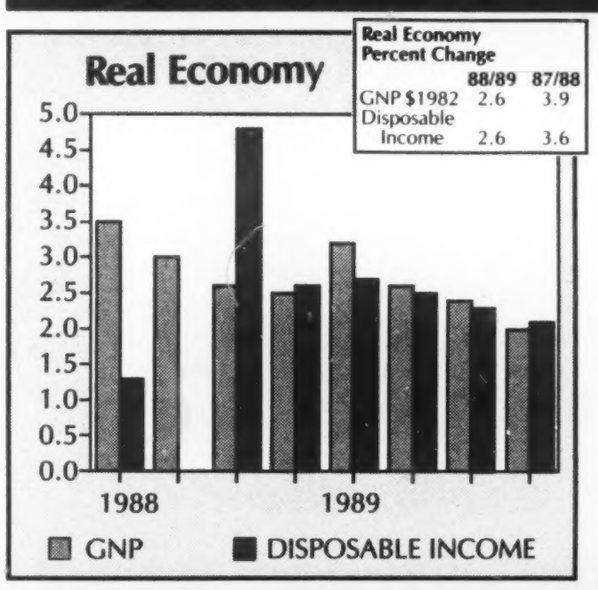
In 1985, rehab spending on rental properties in the Northeast rose 83.3 percent, and 134.8 percent in the West. In the Midwest there was a decline of 29.8 percent, while the South was up only 21.9 percent. Since then, the Northeast has declined due to the higher number of new units; the Midwest rebounded sharply as its economy recovered; the South recovered in 1987; but gains in the West moderated.

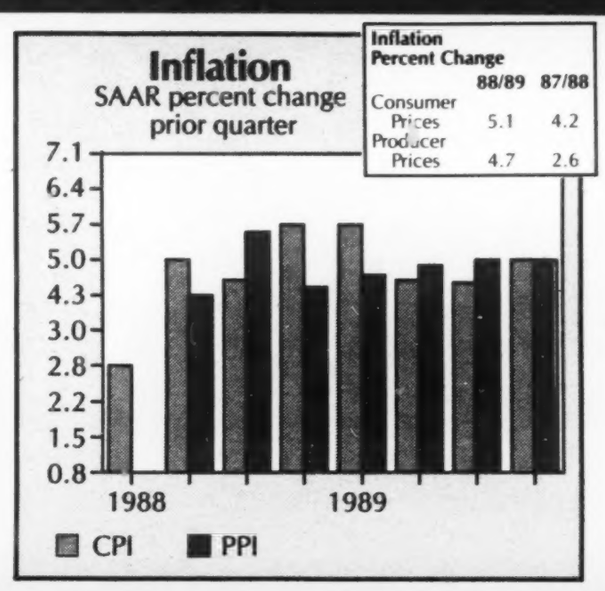
Increases in alteration and repair of rental units during 1988 and 1989 will not match the 7.3 percent gain in 1987. Rises of 2 percent in 1988 and 7 percent in 1989 appear more likely.

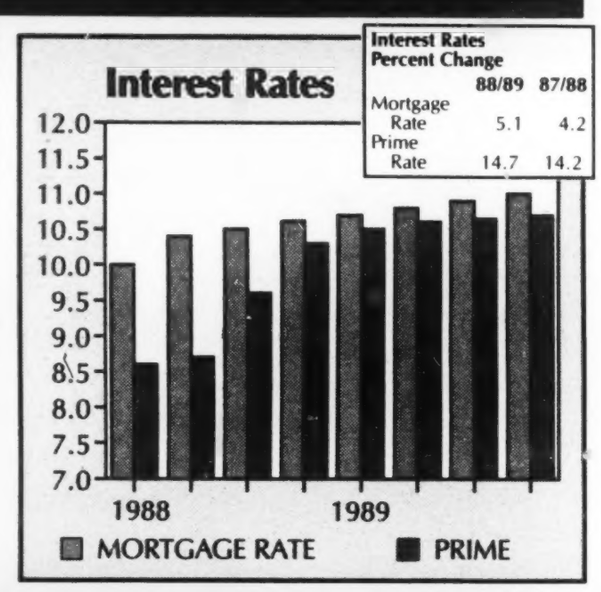
For building material retailers, about 38 percent of sales comes from the maintenance and remodeling of rental properties. While this market's growth will slow in 1988 and 1989, it will still be a major source of sales.

Richard Mount is president and chief economist with Mount Economic Consulting.

General Business Conditions







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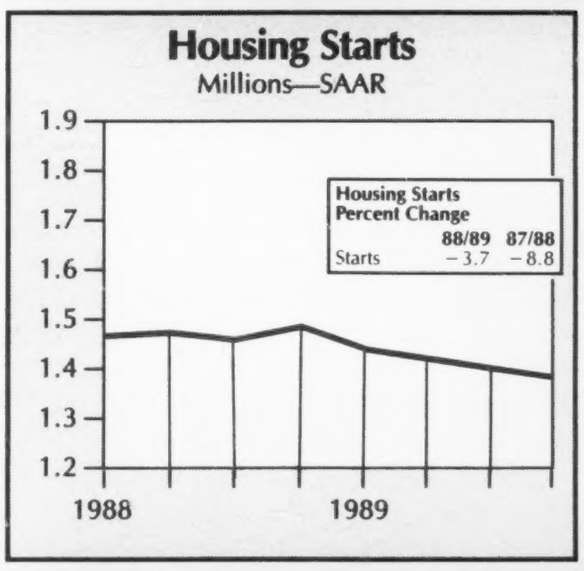
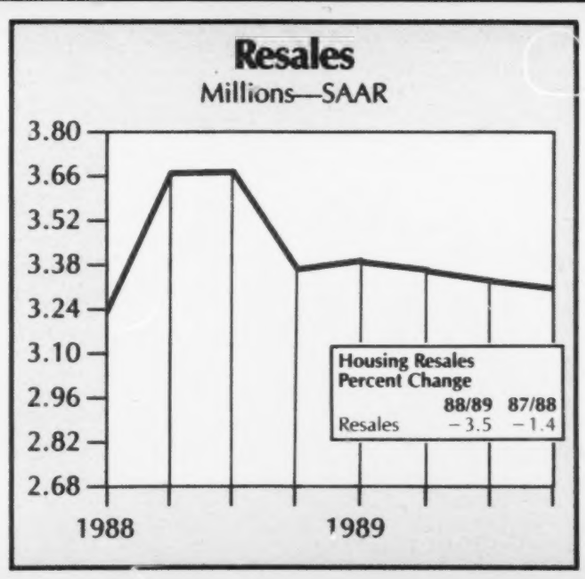
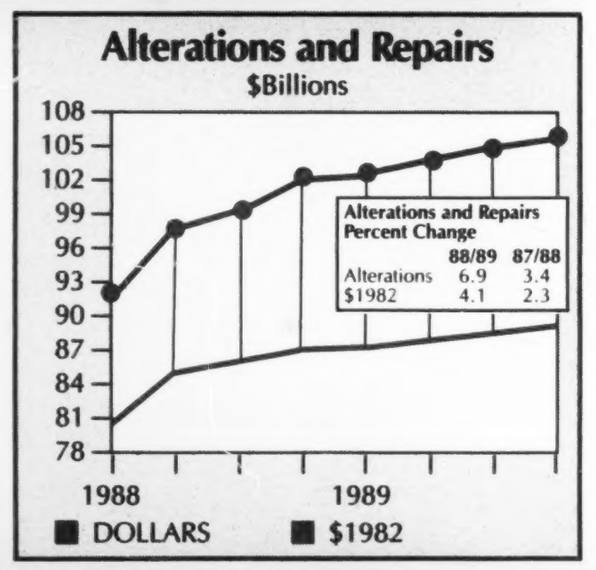
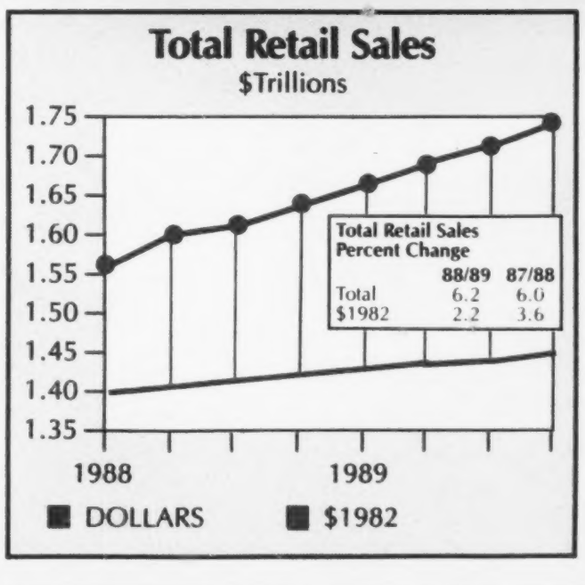
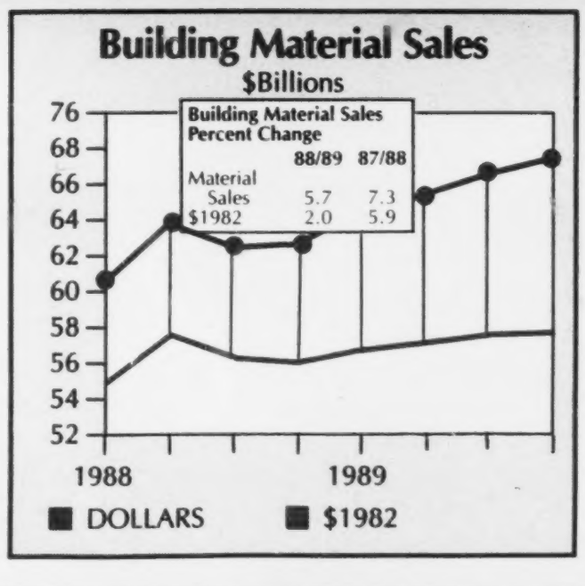


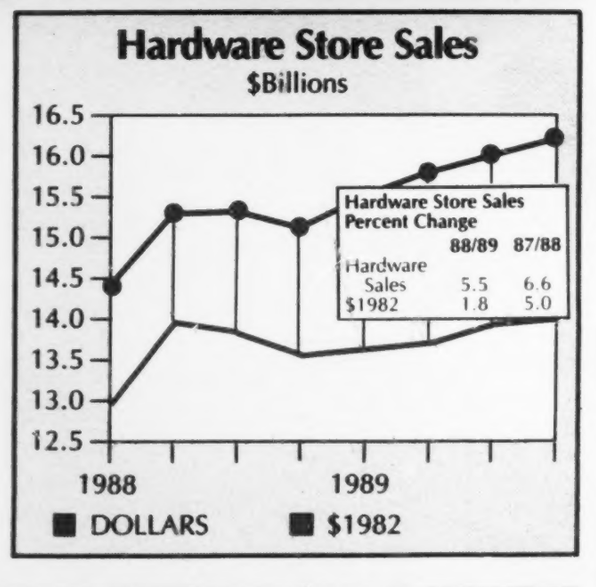




Retail Trade Activity







Data: Dept. of Commerce
Bureau of Labor Statistics
National Association of Realtors
Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

The Home Center Industry Outlook runs in two parts, one each month. The first part includes latest data on the General Economic Outlook; Residential Alterations & Repairs; and Retail Trade Activity. The second part includes latest data on regional building material and supply store sales.

SAAR—Seasonally Adjusted Annual Rate
p—projection
NHCN chart

Louisiana chain updates units, trims headquarters

(Continued from page 6)

But the worst may not be over, as Louisiana's 9.7 unemployment rate is the nation's highest, and its economy is still weak.

Now run by its founding family's third generation, Harry's has decentralized and gives its store managers more power. It has also increased its reliance on its buying group, Ace Hardware, from which it now buys 85 percent of its merchandise.

Its two units have been downsized to be more competitive. During the renovation of its 15-year-old store in Gretna, La., floor space was reduced to 12,000 square feet from 16,000.

This unit fights for what business there is left against a 70,000-square-foot West store only six blocks away and a Home Depot a mile away,

More basic items

Harry's merchandise mix has evolved with the economy and now places greater emphasis on basic hardware items. More expensive lines, such as barbecue grills, have been dropped.

It is turning to Ace, which has installed new regional policies, for products specific to the market, and will soon take advantage of Ace's regional ad program by using the co-op's regional printer and staff to do the designs and still produce a customized Harry's ad.

Last year, Harry's added United Parcel Service pick up, and during the Republican Convention introduced itself to the network television stations before conventioneers hit town.

As a result, Harry's sold $10,000 worth of materials, according to Don Shellist, vp-operations, including electrical supplies, rope and 80 duplicate keys for the bathroom.

This year Harry's will add $200,000 in sales from its new "premium" business, which supplies companies with products for premiums or giveaways. This profitable side business averages 18 percent margins, according to Phil Deutch, Harry's president.

Vice president Hal Becker runs the premiums program and is in charge of developing more commercial business as the outside sales person. His call list will include the local hospitals and the two universities as well as the blossoming hotel market.

Labor a problem

Back in the stores, Harry's still has trouble finding qualified help, as Louisiana's illiteracy rate is one of the highest in the country. It is common for applicants for store positions to fail the National Retail Hardware Association's standard reading and math tests.

Ten percent of its total work force is students working flexible hours; students make up almost 40 percent of its Carollton store workers.

"Most of the students are putting themselves through school and [they have] been a big benefit to that store," said Shellist.

Brian Starr, now a computer major, has been with the company since junior high school. He wrote 90 percent of the company's computer manual and is now working on programming for Harry's as part of his thesis.

84 Lumber rolls out major expansion plans

(Continued from page 1)

"So much of Joe's time has been taken up by the resort, but now he's turning his attention to growing the chain again," said Denny Brua, 84's vp-store operations.

Style will remain same

Brua thought that the company was likely to concentrate its expansion east of the Mississippi River and primarily in the Northeast.

Company spokesperson Cecil Brunton noted, though, that "we'll continue to look to open stores in all parts of the country."

Brunton said that 84's new units won't deviate from that which has served the company since its founding by Hardy in 1957: a 20,000-square-foot, unheated store on 3-to-5 acres stocking between 1,500 and 2,500 items and between $350,000 and $550,000 in inventory.

Brunton said finding the new sites would be handled by 84's Land Development division, which will be moved into a new 17,000-square-foot office. The expansion would be funded internally.

Centralized buying

Perhaps most dramatic of all 84 Lumber's plans is its decision to shutter its regional buying offices and buy all products out of its headquarters.

The company has been moving in this direction for the past few years, and had closed down its regional locations in Arlington, Texas and Denver prior to this latest round of moves.

The offices to be shuttered are in Reno, Nev.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Pineville, N.C., near Charlotte; Baltimore; Aurora, Ill., near Chicago; and Pittsburgh.

Brunton couldn't be precise about how many layoffs resulted from the closings.

84's centralization will require expansion of its headquarters facilities.

"We anticipate the need for over 250 entry level computer and clerical positions to cover not only new work but existing work of promoted office associates," said George Handyside, 84 Lumber's vp-administration.

It will also expand its current headquarters offices by 26,000 square feet by 1995.

With sales exceeding $900 million last year, 84 is the second largest private retailer in the industry behind Payless Cashways. It is tightly held by the Hardy family.

Broadway For Your Home shutters unit

(Continued from page 5)

since the store's conception in 1985," Miller said. He blamed "a dilution of the Kansas City marketplace." A Builders Square unit is slated to open a store in Lenexa next month.

Relying on demographic data they had assembled, Miller and Robert Potts Associates, Broadway's Dallas-based design house, redid the entire store to effect a group of small boutiques.

The store's 30,000 stock-keeping units were heavily slotted toward fashion items in kitchen and bath, but included the full line of hardware, plumbing and electrical basics.

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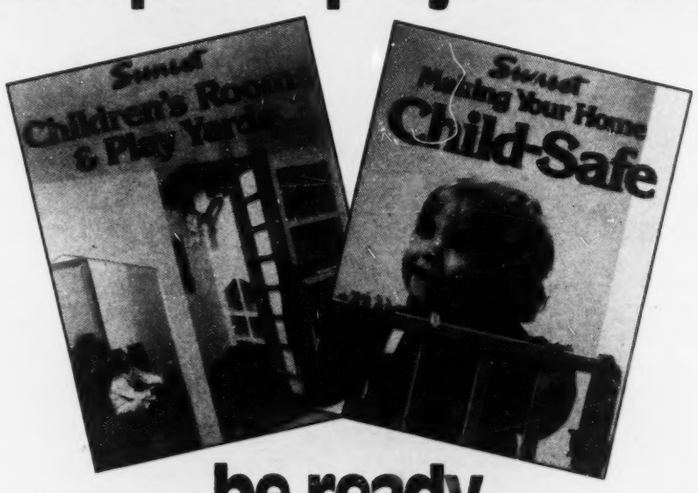

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